

## IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows.

1. (original) A method of stereospecifically preparing a 3-hydroxy-5 $\beta$ -H steroidal sapogenin or a derivative thereof, which comprises reducing a 3-keto-5 $\beta$ -H steroidal sapogenin using a reducing agent comprising a hindered organoborane or an organo-aluminium hydride.
2. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the reducing agent is a hindered organoborane reagent in which organic groups contain more than two carbon atoms and the sapogenin obtained is predominantly a 3 $\beta$ -hydroxy, 5 $\beta$ -H- sapogenin.
3. (currently amended) A method according to claim 1 ~~or claim 2~~, wherein hindered organoborane is selected from lithium tri-*sec*-butylborohydride, potassium tri-*sec*-butylborohydride, sodium tri-*sec*-butylborohydride, lithium trisiamylborohydride, potassium trisiamylborohydride, potassium triphenylborohydride and lithium triphenylborohydride.
4. (original) A method according to claim 3, wherein the hindered organoborane is lithium tri-*sec*-butylborohydride.
5. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the organo-aluminium hydride is lithium tri-*tert*-butoxyaluminumhydride.
6. (currently amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, wherein the molar ratio of the predominant sapogenin obtained to the alternative 3-epimer, is at least about 10:1.
7. (original) A method according to claim 6, wherein the ratio is at least about 15:1.
8. (currently amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1,

when performed in an organic solvent selected from tetrahydrofuran, toluene, tert-butyl methyl ether, diethoxymethane, 1,4-dioxane, 2-methyltetrahydrofuran and any mixture thereof.

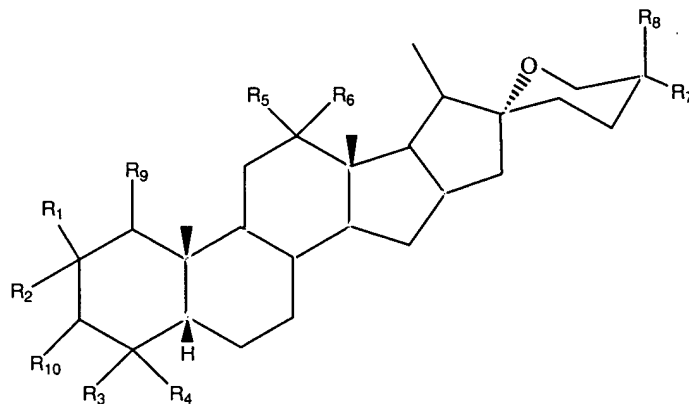
9. (original) A method according to claim 8, wherein the organic solvent consists essentially of tetrahydrofuran.

10. (original) A method according to claim 8, wherein the organic solvent consists essentially of toluene.

11. (original) A method according to claim 8, wherein the organic solvent consists essentially of 1,4-dioxane.

12. (original) A method according to claim 8, wherein the organic solvent consists essentially of 2-methyltetrahydrofuran.

13. (currently amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, wherein the desired sapogenin is a compound of general formula.



wherein R<sub>1</sub>, R<sub>2</sub>, R<sub>3</sub>, R<sub>4</sub>, R<sub>5</sub>, R<sub>6</sub>, R<sub>7</sub>, R<sub>8</sub> and R<sub>9</sub> are, independently of each other, H, C<sub>1-4</sub> alkyl, OH, or OR (where R = C<sub>6-12</sub> aryl or C<sub>1-4</sub> alkyl), or R<sub>5</sub> and R<sub>6</sub> together may represent a =O (carbonyl) or

protected carbonyl group, the stereochemistry at carbon centre 3 can be either R or S, and R<sub>10</sub> represents OH, an O-linked sugar group or any organic ester group.

14. (original) A method according to claim 13, wherein the sapogenin is selected from sarsasapogenin, episarsasapogenin, smilagenin, epismilagenin and esters thereof.

15. (currently amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~claim 1, wherein the 3- keto, 5 $\beta$ -H steroidal sapogenin starting material is prepared by heterogeneous catalytic hydrogenation of a corresponding  $\Delta^4$ , 3-keto steroidal sapogenin to convert the  $\Delta^4$ , 3-keto steroidal sapogenin at least predominantly to the said 5 $\beta$ -H, 3-ketone.

16. (original) A method according to claim 15, wherein the heterogeneous catalytic hydrogenation is performed using hydrogen and a palladium catalyst in an organic solvent.

17. (original). A method according to claim 16, wherein the palladium catalyst is present on a support.

18. (currently amended) A method according to ~~any one of claims 15 to 17~~claim 15, wherein the  $\Delta^4$ , 3-keto steroidal sapogenin is diosgenone.

19. (original) A method according to claim 18, wherein the diosgenone is obtained by oxidation of diosgenin.

20. (original) A method for the conversion of 3 $\alpha$ -hydroxy-5 $\beta$ -H steroidal sapogenins and derivatives thereof to 3 $\beta$ -hydroxy-5 $\beta$ -H steroidal sapogenins and derivatives thereof, which comprises contacting a 3-hydroxy-activated derivative of a 3 $\alpha$ -hydroxy-5 $\beta$ -H steroidal sapogenin with a nucleophile under conditions favouring nucleophilic substitution with inversion at the 3-position, with optional subsequent adjustment of the 3-substituent as desired.